Concerning Christ and the Church

A Personal Statement of Faith
Regarding the Triune God, R*edemption*,
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Opening Declaration

I believe and confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16). God was manifested in the flesh in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:14; 1 Tim. 3:16). He died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3–4).

Through the precious blood of Christ redemption has been accomplished.
"You were not redeemed with corruptible things… but with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18–19).
Through His blood believers receive forgiveness of sins (Eph. 1:7), justification before God (Rom. 5:9), and access into the presence of God (Heb. 10:19).

Salvation is received through repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). Those who receive the word are baptized in water in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38), identifying with His death and resurrection (Rom. 6:4). Through the new birth believers receive the life of God and are joined to the Lord.
"He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him" (1 Cor. 6:17).

The Mystery Revealed

The apostles speak of the mystery, once hidden but now revealed through the gospel (Rom. 16:25–26). This mystery is revealed in two great aspects.

First is the mystery of God, which is Christ. In Him the invisible God is made known. Christ is the image of the invisible God, and in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 1:15; 2:9). Thus Paul speaks of the knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ (Col. 2:2).

Second is the mystery of Christ, which is the church. Through the gospel Jews and Gentiles become members of the same Body (Eph. 3:3–6). The church is the Body of Christ, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Eph. 1:22–23).
God is revealed in Christ, and Christ is expressed in the church.

The Triune God

I believe in the one true and living God who has revealed Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19).
The Father is the source of all things and the One who sent the Son for our salvation (John 3:16).
The Son is the eternal Word who became flesh (John 1:1,14). In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9). He is both Son of God and Son of Man.
The Holy Spirit regenerates believers and dwells within them, baptizing them into one Body (Rom. 8:9–11; 1 Cor. 12:13).

Man — Spirit, Soul, and Body

Man was created by God according to His purpose.
"The LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7).
The New Testament confirms the threefold constitution of man:
"May your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless" (1 Thess. 5:23).
Through the new birth the human spirit is regenerated by the Spirit of God (John 3:6).

Christ — The Center of God's Purpose

Jesus Christ is the center of God's eternal purpose. He is our righteousness, peace, and life (1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 2:14; Col. 3:4). He is the Head of the church (Col. 1:18), and through the indwelling Spirit Christ lives within His people (Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:27).

The Church — Universal and Local

The church is the Body of Christ, composed of all who belong to Him (Eph. 1:22–23). Though the Body is one universally, the New Testament reveals that it is expressed locally.

The Scriptures speak of the church in Jerusalem, the church of God in Corinth, and the churches addressed in the cities of Asia (Acts 8:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; Rev. 1:11).

Thus the apostolic pattern is simple:

one Body universally — one church in each city

The local church does not create the Body of Christ but expresses that one Body in a particular locality.

Matters That Are Non-Negotiable

Certain matters belong to the nature of the church and cannot be altered:

- the headship of Christ over the church (Col. 1:18)
- justification by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8–9)
- the oneness of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:4)
- one church in one city (1 Cor. 1:2)
- the functioning of every member (1 Cor. 12)
- a plurality of elders shepherding the church (Acts 14:23)
- the Lord's Table in remembrance of Christ (1 Cor. 11:23–26)

Matters of Liberty

Other things fall into the area of personal conscience, where Scripture doesn't require everyone to practice them the same way. This includes things like food, the keeping of certain days, how we dress, whether we use musical instruments, how many times we meet each week, and whether to tithe (Rom. 14:2–6).

The Proper Fellowship of the Saints

True Christian fellowship is grounded in the life of Christ Himself.

"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9).

All who believe that Jesus is the Christ are born of God and share the same eternal life (1 John 5:1; 1 John 1:2–3). Yet the New Testament shows that this fellowship is lived out within the church.

The Fellowship of the Churches

While the church is expressed locally, the New Testament also reveals the fellowship of the churches. The churches cared for one another and shared in mutual encouragement and practical help (Acts 15:1–31; 2 Cor. 8:1–4).

The Three Realms of Fellowship

The New Testament reveals three closely related spheres of fellowship:

- fellowship with the Son of God (1 Cor. 1:9)
- fellowship among the saints in the local church (Acts 2:42)
- fellowship among the churches (Rom. 16:16; Acts 15)

When these three aspects of fellowship are preserved together—the fellowship of Christ Himself, the fellowship of the saints in the local church, and the fellowship of the churches—the result is the health, upbuilding, and longevity of each local church according to the apostolic pattern. This is real New Testament local church life.

Concluding Summary

The truth concerning Christ and the church must be understood in its full scriptural scope: the truth concerning the Person and work of Christ, and the truth concerning the church as His Body, expressed both universally and locally. True Christian fellowship therefore consists of fellowship in Christ Himself and is expressed in the one Body of Christ and in its local churches.